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Voices of Hope from Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*

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"What was wanted I thought," Sherwood Anderson would say of short story writing in America around the time, in 1916, that he began composing the sketches that would make up *Winesburg, Ohio,* "was form, not plot, an all together more elusive and difficult thing to come at."[1] Anderson's complaint with plotted fiction and its prescription of cause and effect was that the writer delivered contrived resolutions. With Anderson, with his Winesburg stories, there would be none of that. In fact he was to explain some years after their publication that the stories "were obviously written by one who did not know the answers,"[2] implying of course that for that they were all the smarter about life, which he had described as "a loose, flowing thing," void of plot.[3] It was in that image of life that he cast his stories.

However, with some critics therein lie the problem. Upon its publication in 1919, one critic greeted *Winesburg* by declaring it "not stories at all." Another found fault with the collection for its lack of the kind of "simplicity and directness" that could be found in Edgar Lee Masters' verse monologue *Spoon River Anthology*[4] (a literary work and form, several critics have noted, which to some extent likely inspired Anderson to write his volume of connected tales), declaring as well that Anderson was "frequently crude in his employment of English [and] he has not a nice sense of word values."[5] And though there were those critics who found the work an honest depiction of life and morality in small town America, most claimed that it was a distorted view, that at best the stories were inaccurate, and at worst, to quote Anderson on of the kind of language the

critics used to describe the tales' moral shortcomings, "unclean, dirty, filthy." One reviewer, while noting the work's "keen" observation and "insight into character," found fault with Anderson for his unearthing of "such a large percentage of neurotics"[6] as the town's characters represented, implying either that their numbers were far off those found in real life, or that whatever the number, it was better left buried. As equally unforgiving was the judgement espoused by the critic who condemned *Winesburg* for the "depressing view" it gave of life, allowing that while it showed a "partial element of truth," it did so with a "huge element of mendacity."[7]

Of course, the notions that the collection gave a twisted, a somewhat untruthful and, so, unreliable account of life in small town America, and that its artistic shortcomings were greater than its strengths, were not held by all critics. One applauded Anderson's "fortitude to expose the curtained corners of existence in an American small town," going on to describe the volume as "a social chronicle as pitiless as life itself," with no happy endings.[8] And H. L. Mencken, the noted American journalist, author and critic, was effusive in his praise of the book. Recognizing the efficacy of Anderson's aesthetics of form over plot, Mencken claimed that *Winesburg* lifted "the short story, for long a form hardened by trickery and virtuosity [in the hands of O. Henry et al.], to a higher and more spacious level," and that it got "into that form something of the mordant bitterness of tragic drama...."[9]

It would seem, however, that while those early critics were somewhat in disagreement as to whether or not the volume had moral and/or artistic merit, they appeared to concur that *Winesburg, Ohio* gave a vision of life that was, in the words of the last two reviewers above, decidedly "pitiless" and "tragic." A common complaint of the critics was that it was a vision that showed the ugly without giving equal account of the humorous, kindlier, the more humane and cleaner side of small town life. And partly in kind, if not to the same degree, Anderson's own reading of *Winesburg* was not dissimilar to theirs. But even as he wrote of the Winesburg tales

that "[s]ome of the studies [were] pretty raw," and that there was "a sad note running through them [with one or two of the stories getting] pretty closely down to the ugly things of life," he maintained that what was notable about *Winesburg* was that it did "treat those American villagers, twisted as they may be—'queer hopping figures' as a critic once called them—it does treat their lives with respect."[10]

In the strictest sense, of course, *Winesburg* is not a description of real, small town life in America, as by definition art cannot give us anything more than an artificial and mimetic version of its subject. Rather, *Winesburg* is a study that mixes the imaginative and real worlds. In any case, Anderson did not intend for the fictional 1890's town of Winesburg, modeled on real Midwest towns he had lived in, including the Clyde, Ohio of his birth, to be one in which every inhabitant found fulfillment and happiness. The stories were not, Anderson would write, "nice little packages," but rather stark descriptions of life, each tale a look at the inner workings of the characters, at their hidden natures, and at the society they inhabited. They were intended to expose "the essence of things,"[11] that is, life's depth, from out of which came, Anderson wrote, "real men and real women." Consequently, this Winesburg was a place where common people struggled with the common problems of life. As John Updike wrote in a 1984 essay, the townspeople of Winesburg were not "neurotic," but had become a part of the "human condition ... only insofar as unfulfillment and restlessness—a nagging sense that real life is elsewhere—are intrinsically a part of it."[12]

Updike certainly does much there to take the residents out of the ward of isolation earlier critics had put them in, but the reprieve is short-lived, in that Updike implies, too, that there is something exceptional in the characters which makes them different from you and me, unless, of course, we suffer their maladies and the life of isolation that would be their result. But more to the point, Updike, as other critics before him, does not give due regard to a second and equally pervasive tone in the stories, namely, that of hope. True, it is a hope fighting, as the town's school

teacher Kate Swift experiences it, with grief and unflagging desire (89). And more often than not for the "grotesques" of the stories, as the *Winesburg* lineup of lonely characters on the fringe of society are called, it is unrealized. But it is what sustains them, at least long enough for them to tell their stories, the gains of which will be discussed in the course of this paper. Hope, even, gives some their reason to unburden themselves of their tale.

One of the many motifs that holds the Winesburg cycle together is that of the train. Its whistle arouses those susceptible to its call with "renewed activity" (73), as if alerting them to some distant, if unspecified promise; its cars carry people to and from Winesburg, some with defeat hanging over their heads, and others with their thoughts on the better life they imagine lies at the end of the journey. In a bit of tragic irony, the story "The Untold Lie" tells of a drunken Windpeter Winters standing in his buggy, whipping his horse and screaming with pained delight as he rushes headlong into the path of an oncoming locomotive. In this horrifying way he takes himself out of life in a blaze of glory, and out of Winesburg, too, it might be added, except where he remains in the memories of boys such as young George Willard who will always admire him for his "foolish courage ... wishing ... they could die gloriously instead of just being grocery clerks" (112-13). As for George Willard—Anderson's fictionalized version of himself, and in his name the receiver and retainer of a good part of the Winesburg saga—he eventually takes the train out of Winesburg. Knowing as we do whom and what he represents, and with nothing in the text to suggest otherwise, we can assume that eventually he finds success as a writer, which, long before he has ever decided to leave, is just what most in the village expect of him.

Any critical analysis of the tales which paints them as little more than a record of singular alienation and hopelessness, of people meeting unhappy endings does not do justice to the characters, to the collection, nor to Anderson's intentions in putting it together. This paper will work to temper such disproportioned judgment under the uniform light of

contextual evidence and Anderson's own comments on the work. Furthermore, his reasons for choosing to tell the stories within the frame of the short story cycle—the stories and characters linked by a common narrator, the narrator serving as the conduit to the world outside—will be examined, as will be the more common features of the cycle genre. In addition, the way in which the short story cycle form molds the message of *Winesburg, Ohio* as it delivers its tales will be scrutinized.

In a letter to Arthur Barton, a New York playwright with whom in 1932 Anderson began corresponding over the playwright's proposal that they collaborate on a dramatic adaptation of *Winesburg*, Anderson explained that the theme of the work was "the making of a man out of the actual stuff of life," and it was this theme, "holding together from story to story," that made *Winesburg* a book, differentiating it, that is to say, from a random collection of short stories. To insure in the play that the ending—which in the *Winesburg* book sees George Willard, the town's young journalist and the key figure in the stories, leaving the town for a new beginning in life—was effective, the buildup to it, Anderson wrote, must be central, because if central, then it would be significant, and if significant, then all that happens to George would "naturally affect all the characters throughout the play."[13]

As might be expected, that design stands as a description of the relationship between the characters and George in the volume of stories. *Winesburg* is the story of George's place in and effect on a village and its people, and conversely, theirs on him. It is the story of a boy maturing, and often times stumbling, we might say, into manhood, of a young man of too many words and too little understanding of what life is about, of a green journalist observing life as he begins to contemplate the work of a writer. It is, Anderson observed, "the real environment out of which present-day American youth is coming."[14]

Anderson wrote that with *Winesburg, Ohio* he brought the short story in America "into a new relation with life."[15] In fact, the idea of the

collection was to bring up for viewing the secret and lonely lives of the Winesburg townsfolk, and the impact was made all the more powerful and its application all the more universal by the stories being assembled into one volume, with each story telling of its character's estrangement from community, while contrasting that with the commonality of their experience. "What I think we want," Anderson wrote to Arthur Barton, "[is] to make people feel that a cross-section taken thus from a life in a small town would not differ from a cross-section of life taken from anywhere and that the forces over this boy George Willard are the same ... that play over all American boys."[16]

The volume, originally subtitled "A Group of Tales of Ohio Small Town Life," is peopled with characters desperate to have their tales told, but who for one reason or another are incapable of doing the telling themselves, at least to the public at large. In the story "Loneliness" we meet Enoch Robinson, a man who "knew what he wanted to say, but he also knew that he could never by any possibility say it" (93). And then there is Seth Richmond, "the 'deep one'" as he is called by the townspeople with respect and in anticipation of his one day breaking out and making something of himself. In his story, "The Thinker," he states with much hostility that he prefers not to talk and not to be talked to. Words do nothing but irritate him: "Everyone talks and talks.... I'm sick of it. I'll do something," he says, echoing a not uncommon, if vague declaration by others of that disconsolate lot of Winesburg inhabits. He will, he continues, "get into some kind of work where talk don't count" (77). However, his aversion to conversing with others reflects not only his inability to express himself, but also the restless, unsettled spirit in him that has him eventually leaving Winesburg, and with it, the young lady, Helen White, both he and George Willard are enamored of. But he imagines that for someone as uncommunicative as himself there really are few options in life and in romance. Love, he is certain, works out only for "some one who talks a lot—some one like that George Willard" (77).

Not all the characters are as intimidated or as put off by language as

are these two, of course. Still, while their reticence or their distrust of "talk" may close for them and their kind some doors, such as the one to intimacy, it seems a way of opening others for other characters. Kate Swift, the school teacher, having recognized "the spark of genius" in a piece George had written for class, speaks to him one night, telling him, "You must not become a mere peddler of words. The thing to learn is to know what people are thinking about, not what they say" (90). Langua ge—the words and the voice that carries it, she means—is the surface of life. To know what people are thinking, on the other hand, is to know their "essential life." And if the boy wants to be a writer, are her instructions to him, he will have to know life (89).

Both Enoch and Seth eventually leave Winesburg. Enoch moves to New York, works in business, marries, and ultimately fails at the latter two ventures, returning a broken and disillusioned man to the town some fifteen years later. For Seth, Winesburg becomes ordinary, "quite definite and limited in its outlines" (77). He has outgrown it, and tells himself that striking out on his own and getting work is just what he needs, because work is what he is good for. The story does not tell us whether or not he will be successful in that endeavor, but it seems he is too resentful of the kind of intimacy he imagines comes naturally to the likes of Helen White and George Willard, and which he believes himself incapable of, to find happiness. That said, being that his urge to experience life beyond Winesburg mirrors George's own, his departure by train from Winesburg appears in hindsight to be a laying of the groundwork for George's move out into the world. It is as if in taking that step, true or false for himself as the case may be, Seth is showing George the way.

Contrasted to Enoch and Seth is "the stranger," as he is called in the short sketch "Tandy." He comes some unspecified time earlier to Winesburg to "cure himself of the habit of drink" (78). He sits one evening on the porch of the New Willard House, which is the hotel owned and run by George Willard's father, preaching to Tom Hard, a Winesburg local and the town agnostic, and to the man's seven-year-old daughter, of his

addiction to drink and, more intriguingly, of his greater addiction to love: "I am a lover and have not found my thing to love" (79). But he has found a listener in Tom, and in the omniscient narrator of his story he has found someone to give it voice and by that the form it needs to get itself heard. And though he admits that he has not found the cure he came seeking for himself, he has this to say: "There is a woman coming.... I have missed her, you see. She did not come in my time.... [But] I know about ... her struggles and her defeats. It is because of her defeats that she is to me the lovely one. Out of her defeats has been born a new quality in woman. I have a name for it. I call it Tandy.... It is the quality of being strong to be loved" (79).

At this point in the story the stranger drops to his knees, presses the child's hands to his "drunken lips," and pleads, "Be Tandy, little one.... Dare to be strong and courageous.... Venture anything. Be brave enough to dare to be loved. Be something more than man or woman. Be Tandy" (79). And, as the story comes to a close, we see that in fact she will take on "the vision ... the drunkard had brought to her," though at her age, the narrator lets us know, she obviously does not yet have the tools to bear it. In any case, despite the hardships he has endured in life, in fact, because of them "the stranger" has "not lost faith." Only from hardship, his story seems to be telling us, can a person truly know what faith can deliver, and it is this message that he passes on to the young girl, praying that she will take it to heart and fare better in life than he has.

Anderson called these citizens of Winesburg, "simple, good people ... living in obscurity in their own little village."[17] They lived anonymously, such as did "the stranger" in the story "Tandy," but as he did, they sought out someone to tell their stories to, or they sought a spokesperson to do the telling for them. Often they used George Willard, the town's young journalist, much in the same way, Anderson was to write, he was used by the real-life people who entrusted him with the stories on which the Winesburg tales were based.

Being heard, telling his or her story, or having it told by another

allows the speaker to be accounted for and given a place in the community. Dunn and Morris in their study of the short story cycle, *The Composite Novel: The Short Story Cycle in Transition*, explain that story telling is a communal experience, "[a] kind of shared experience [growing] out of a strong community base."[18] *Winesburg*, simply stated, allows its characters to have their say. It allows them a public voice through which they can pour out their stories, with George Willard being the receptacle for a number of them. And in allowing that voice, it delineates a form for the story, much in the same way, one might imagine, that a stylus picks notes out of the grooves of an LP, and then sends forth a melody. It is the characters' need of such an arrangement and ordering of their lives, as well as their need of community, of making connections, that drives them to get their stories told and heard. And whether, ultimately, the speaker is Anderson the writer, his fictive alter ego, George Willard, or the collection's omniscient narrator, that spokesperson carries the stories out and into the greater community, bridging the gap of isolation, with the telling of each story further serving to narrow the divides of silence and alienation that separate the characters from each other.

As for why those who went to George Willard sought him out, and not some other inhabitant of Winesburg, one reason can be found in the words of Enoch Robinson, who one evening visits George in his room, and tells him, "I have looked at you when you went past me on the street and I think you can understand.... All you have to do is to believe what I say, just listen and believe, that's all there is to it" (96). There is the idea, too, held by many of the Winesburg folk that George would some day become a writer, this giving him a prominence, along with the right credentials and temperament for the job of story teller, that they do not have. Further, the perception held by these people, the grotesques, the "odd figures inhabiting [the town's] margins,"[19] was that George belonged to the town in a way they did not. Paraphrasing the character Elmer Cowley, George Willard typified the town, represented its spirit and its opinion

(107).

To that extent, he was their connection to the community of Winesburg. But the relationship between George and these folks was one of give and take. The stories initially flowed one way, but the benefit gained from their telling was mutual, and was often intended as such. "There are all sorts of influences playing over [George] and around him," wrote Anderson. "These influences are presented in the form of characters, playing on his own character, forming it, warning him, educating him."[20] Those warnings, in a nut shell, cautioned the young man not to let happen to him what had happened to the speaker. "You may end by becoming just such another fool," Dr. Parcival warns George. "I want to warn you and keep on warning you. That's why I seek you out" (25).

Anderson was forty-years-old at the time he began writing the "short tales" that would become *Winesburg, Ohio*, and living in a Chicago rooming house, and it was his fellow lodgers—musicians, painters, actors, and the like—and the stories they told him that gave him the material for *Winesburg, Ohio*, and the impetus to put them down on paper: "I had set upon an idea and am quite sure the idea had come out of a certain rather fine feeling, toward myself, by the people about me."[21]

The "idea" referred to here, Anderson would explain, was to take his fellow boarders, "just as they were, as I felt them, and transfer them from the city rooming house to an imagined small town....,"[22] with the "fine feeling" being what he got from the confidence they showed in him by entrusting their stories to him: "It was as though the people of that [Chicago rooming] house ... wanting so much, none of them really equipped to wrestle with life as it was, had ... used me ... had got through me ... their stories told, and not in their own persons, but ... through the lives of these queer small town people of the book."[23] Anderson pays tribute to them as the "fathers and ... the mothers of the Winesburg stories."[24] But just as they were doing him a turn, so he was doing them one, and, through them, their fictional counterparts in *Winesburg* by instilling in the latter "some inner truth" of the former, consequently

giving them depth of character. As well, he wove a connection between the real and the fictitious by repeating characters and themes and symbols through the tales, believing that only in that way would he get at the essential nature of an individual.

The form Anderson chose to tell these tales, one which he called "my Winesburg form," was the short story cycle. While the form has been labeled, among various terms, short story composite, short story sequence, and composite novel, this last emphasizing its novel-like characteristics over those that align it with the short story, the term "short story cycle" seems a more precise rendering of the genre's aesthetics, and in particular, more descriptive of what Anderson has done with *Winesburg*. As Forrest L. Ingram explains in his seminal work, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the 20th Century*, in cycles the interconnected parts of the stories (motifs, symbols, characters, words) seem to move the cycle forward in a pattern of development: "The motions of a wheel is a single process. In a single process, too, the thematic core of a cycle expands and deepens as the elements of the cycle repeat themselves in varied contexts." Recurrence and development make up the patterns that move a cycle along. That recurrence may be symmetrical, using narration and theme, or asymmetrical, using the "associational technique" found in *Winesburg*. As such, the recurrent elements rotate around a thematic center. These elements repeat, turn in on themselves, recur, and the whole wheel moves forward. In this way the "pattern of the whole" structures the "many" into an integral "one."[25]

Among the examples of such cycles besides *Winesburg, Ohio* are Joyce's *Dubliners*, Hemingway's *In Our Time*, Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children*, John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*, and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*. As a number of critics have noted, the combining of stories to create a linked series dates back to *The Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio's *The Decameron*. Still, it seems obvious that Anderson was doing more than stringing together miscellaneous stories, and for that, *Winesburg*,

Ohio is a representative example of the modern short story cycle, which some critics have called a new genre, and which Anderson claimed to be his own invention.[25]

In any case, the form allows for a part, a story, a tale, to be complete in itself, to stand by itself, that very aspect of the cycle form reflecting, in the case of the Winesburg stories, the situation of the characters, who stand apart with their stories from the greater community. John Steinbeck, commenting on his cycle, *The Pastures of Heaven*, said that it was "made up of stories each one complete in itself, having its rise, climax, and ending."[27] Nonetheless, the stories in a cycle stand, too, in some relationship to the whole, their juxtaposition to one another giving them a structure, and that structure and their common narration binding them together as no mere collection of short stories would. In *Winesburg*, the characters "seem hardly to know each other; in the narrator's mind they are brothers."[28] Anderson once described the cycle of Winesburg as "individual tales but all about lives in some way connected." The characters of *Winesburg*, standing apart from community, become connected through the story teller in the cycle of stories, said cycle strengthening further a sense of community, or, as J. Gerald Kennedy put it, giving them a collective identity.[29]

It could be said that Anderson gave these "strange little people," as he called them, the real physical parameters of a community of their own by grouping them together in one volume, though obviously such a grouping was not appreciated by all the characters. Elmer Cowley, in the story "Queer," is overcome with resentment, if not hatred of that community, though more specifically of the "public opinion" that has "condemned the [Cowley family] to queerness." He keeps to himself, and since to him George Willard represents public opinion, he considers, "Might not one by striking his person strike also the greater enemy—the thing that smiled and went its own way—the judgment of Winesburg" (107-08).

However, his sentiments against the inhabitants of Winesburg to the contrary, Elmer Cowley needs them. He declares, "I will not be queer....

I'll be like other people." He wants nothing less than to be indistinguishable from them, because in that way he would fit into one of their truths about what is normal in life. That he does not and never will fit, but that he clutches such an anomalous truth so desperately to himself, allowing himself to become so twisted by it that he would wish to strike down the very people it represents, distorts it into a falsehood, thereby making him what he is, that is, one of Winesburg's "grotesques."

We learn in the first entry of the Winesburg chronicles, "The Book of the Grotesque," that "[I]t was truths that made the people grotesques.... [T]he moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood" (6-7). That passage, in its turn, seems a reminder of a quote of Anderson's cited at the beginning of this paper, wherein he stated that the Winesburg stories were written by someone "who did not know the answers." As was noted, this proclamation was not the result of any ignorance about life on his part, but, rather, quite the opposite, with that presumption perhaps no better illustrated than in the story "The Untold Lie."

In the story we meet the characters of Hal Winters, a bachelor and the son of Windpeter Winters—introduced earlier as the man who took his own life by rushing his horse and buggy headlong into an oncoming locomotive—and Ray Pearson, a broken, dispirited fellow who some years previously, we learn, had found himself suddenly married because of "something that had happened" between him and a young lady.

The younger man, Hal, is himself in such a fix with a young woman. While he does not know the history of Ray's relationship with his wife, he goes to the older, married man for advice: "[C]ome on, advise me. I've got Nell in trouble.... Shall I marry and settle down? Shall I put myself in to the harness to be worn out like an old horse?... Whatever you say, Ray, I'll do" (114).

Ray considers his own less than satisfactory situation in life, as well as in marriage, but has no answer for Hal, at least not one that he is

comfortable with imparting to the young man. Nonetheless, by the time he next sees him, Ray has formulated the idea that he "[does not] want Hall to become old and worn out." Yet, upon their meeting, immediately young Hal takes hold of the older man by the lapel of his coat, and shaking him "as he might have shaken a dog that had misbehaved," he lets Ray know that he has already decided the course he will take: "I'm not a coward," he says, revealing, it certainly seems, his feelings about his father and the man's terrible retreat from life, "[and] Nell ain't no fool.... She didn't ask me to marry her. I want to marry her..." (115–16).

Having had his say, Hal leaves, and Ray picks up his overcoat, and moved by the younger man's spirited vision of life as he imagines it will be now that he has decided to marry, "some memory of pleasant evenings spent with the thin-legged children in the tumble-down house ... come into his mind...." Ray then remarks to himself, "Whatever I would have told him would have been a lie." (116) He knows that Hal has come to the right answer for himself, and he realizes something of the truth about his own life, and about life in general, namely, that it is not for the fainthearted.

The cloak of truth, then, is not a one-size-fits-all garment. Returning here to Elmer Cowley of "Queer," we note that the cycle gives him his opportunity to tell his tale, but in the story it is not to those "other people," the ones he wants to be like, the townsfolk, that he goes, but to Mook, a "half-wit" once employed by Elmer's father. Elmer tells this old man, "Everyone [in town] stands around and ... they talk but they say nothing to me. Then I feel so queer that I can't talk either" (109). What, though, a reader might wonder, does he hope to gain from spilling out his story to this apparently less than coherent old man? "I had to tell some one," he says, "and you were the only one I could tell. I hunted out another queer one, you see" (109). And, so, Elmer Cowley seeks and perhaps finds his rightful community, if nonetheless it is a community outside the mainstream.

However, outside is where the Elmers of the world most likely always will remain. At the end of "Queer," Elmer indeed does take out his anger

on a startled George Willard for the persecution, real or imagined, he feels he has suffered at the hands of the Winesburg community. Calling George out to the depot, wild with rage, Elmer hits him with "blow after blow," and then springs aboard the train, leaving for a life that surely will be no less queer than the one he has lived in Winesburg, his exit a sad and ironic contrast to George's own departure from the town.

The aesthetic of the short story cycle, its parts, their *interrelationship* create a coherent whole text, and among the elements that bring this about are isolation and community. Intriguingly, Anderson claimed that the form better fit the American writer than did the novel,[30] and perhaps one reason for him claiming so is explained by J. Gerald Kennedy in his work, *Modern American Short Story Sequences*, where he writes on the subject of national character and aesthetics bringing into finer focus the relationship of story telling, story teller and listener, and the American community: "[O]ur national avidity for organized story collections [is attributable perhaps to our] determination to build a unified republic out of diverse states, regions, and population groups—to achieve the unity expressed by the motto *e pluribus unum*...."[31]

The "population groups" within the United States meld under the American banner of national identity to give the country its brand of homogeneity. Nevertheless, these groups flow out and into a second identity, a second community and culture, so to speak. In fact, to be American, it might be said, means to be multi-cultured, and, so, multi-voiced. With that panoply of voices we call the greater American culture "ours," and the more intimate culture, made up of members of our family, of our race, religion, community, of the members of our or of our ancestors' nationalities, and so on, we call it "our own." In such a dynamic, the larger culture, made up of these divergent cultural entities, finds its voice in that secondary community of voices even as it allows them a forum.

The short story cycle, as a model of the American community, can be seen as the community pulpit, if you will, the cycle giving public voice to as many as its inner structure and length can accommodate. In doing so

it brings those voices together under its banner, and allows that, though a lone individual may be shouting out of the darkness, he or she will be heard. Kennedy, referring to an essay by Roger Shattuck, writes that "aesthetic strategies ... have long been used to render the complexity of modern experience. Projecting diverse situations from different perspectives through separate narratives, the story sequence typically assumes a form reflective of [that] multiplicity."[32] The aesthetic strategy of the short story cycle gives a forum to a diverse people seeking a common voice, recognizing that the individual, even in America, needs not only to be heard, but to belong.

John Updike called *Winesburg* "a democratic plea for the failed, the neglected, and the stuck."[33] It is hoped that the case has been made thus far for it being as well a "democratic plea" *by* the "population groups" mentioned above. Truthfully, though, it cannot be denied that *Winesburg* also tells us, as the Updike statement suggests, that its lineup of characters were a lot on the edge of disenfranchisement. "There was a thing called happiness toward which men were striving," Anderson wrote. "They never got to it." He observed that the ordinary beliefs of the people about him, those that had love lasting indefinitely, that had success equaling happiness, did not seem true. Except that, one gets the sense in the following that those expectations were not necessarily mistaken, but merely overdrawn. "All of life was amazingly accidental," Anderson wrote. "Love, moments of tenderness and despair, came to the poor and the miserable" as to all levels of society. "It began to seem to me," he continued, "that what was most wanted by all people was love, understanding."[34]

If *Winesburg* gives its characters nothing else, it gives them those. In a 1932 letter to Arthur H. Smith, a Methodist Minister who was writing a history of the real Winesburg, Ohio, Anderson explained that his *Winesburg* was "an effort to treat the lives of simple ordinary people in an American middle western town with sympathy and understanding," and he wrote further that while life may have "hurt and twisted them ... [o]n the whole they remained sweet and good."[35]

As with so much else in multilayered *Winesburg*, there is no easily defining the concept of voice. "Hands," the second story in the collection, though the first to be identified as taking place in Winesburg, introduces the character of Wing Biddlebaum, "a fat little old man" who lived "near the edge of a ravine near the town of Winesburg, Ohio" (9). For twenty years he had been a mystery to the town, not only because he chose not to be a part of it, but also because, as George Willard felt it, there was something he was hiding. Yet, "Biddlebaum the silent," a man who spoke best with his hands, "the piston rods of his machinery of expression," found with George "something like friendship" (9-10). In fact, with George at his side he occasionally ventured into town.

One day, his hands "beating like a giant woodpecker" on the top rail of a fence, he excoriated George for wanting "to be like others in the town. You hear them talk," he shouts at George, baring his own aversion to the townspeople and his distrust of words, "and you try to imitate them." He warns the young man that he is "destroying" himself in denying his "inclination to be alone and to dream." Then, suddenly inspired, Wing lays his hands, quiet now, on George's shoulders, and tells him, "You must begin to dream. From this time on you must shut your ears to the roaring of the voices" (11).

Those "voices," at least as Wing wants George Willard to understand them, are life at the surface, and as such, without substance. Dreams, on the other hand, are the reality that stir below, and being so, act as a window into a man or woman, or into the artist, for that matter. "[T]he world of dreams," Walter Rideout explains in his essay, "The Simplicity of *Winesburg, Ohio*," emphasizes "imaginative creativity ... its definition of success in terms of the degree of penetration into the buried life of others."[35] It is dreams, not voices, that a person or an artist must understand and trust in order to get themselves to the essence of life.

The individual voices of those stories show life fragmented and isolated, shallow and quieted. In spite of that, however, there is voice, too,

in *Winesburg* that cuts beneath the surface fabric of life to show something of the inner workings of character. This voice speaks the stories through the narrator, connecting one character to another, even as the individual stories work as barriers to keep them apart. George's mother, Elizabeth Willard, in her story, "Mother," remarks how her son talks "aloud to himself," and how that gives her "a peculiar pleasure." Knowing this about him, she feels a "secret bond" between them, and she thinks, "He is groping about, trying to find himself.... He is not ... all words and smartness. Within him there is a secret something that is striving to grow. It is the thing I let be killed in myself" (18-19).

We meet Elizabeth again in the story "Death," one of the last in the collection. She sits in Doctor Reefy's office, appearing in the eyes of the doctor as "a tired gaunt old woman at forty-one" (126). She tells the doctor, referring to a time long ago when she did not heed the advise of her father not to marry the man she would, Tom Willard, what a fool she had been. But as she goes on, unburdening herself of her story, her voice beginning to "quiver with excitement," Doctor Reefy notices a startling alteration in the woman: "He thought that as she talked the woman's body was changing, that she was becoming younger, straighter, stronger" (126). She tells him of the cloudy, stormy day a few months after her marriage, when she took out the horse and buggy: "Thoughts came and I wanted to get away from my thoughts.... I wanted to get out of town, out of my clothes, out of my marriage, out of my body, out of everything.... I wanted to run away from everything but I wanted to run towards something too" (127).

At this point, she goes to the doctor, kneels by his chair, and the doctor takes her in his arms, only for this moment of passion, affection and understanding, for their chance to become intimates and lovers to be thwarted by the intrusion of a clerk on the landing outside the door. Still, Elizabeth leaves the office with the spark of life as she imagines it might be rekindled in her, "the blood still singing in her body" (127), until the moment she realizes that she has nowhere to go but back home and to the

husband she has never loved. Her story ends with her embracing death, "the lover she had wanted so earnestly" (128).

After her death, George Willard, at eighteen years of age, decides to leave Winesburg. He tells Helen White, "I've been reading books and I've been thinking. I'm going to try to amount to something in life. Well ... that isn't the point. Perhaps I'd better quit talking" (132). He knows enough now, anyway, to know that one can never get at the point through talking. "Speeches he had thought [to give her] seemed utterly pointless" (132). And, of course, one of the lessons of *Winesburg* is that for some people life, that "loose, flowing thing," as Anderson described it, never seems to have a point. But, then again, for some it does. Anderson wrote, "[W]hat I wanted for myself most of all, rather than so-called success ... was to try to develop ... my capacity to feel, see, taste, smell, hear. I wanted ... to be a free man ... always more and more aware of earth, people, streets, houses, towns, cities. I wanted to take all into myself, digest what I could" (150).

He wrote those words to describe his own preoccupations and longings, aesthetic and otherwise. Realizing whatever part of them he did, he then gave us *Winesburg, Ohio.*

When the train comes into the station, George is relieved. One imagines him, electrified with anticipation, thinking, 'There is nothing stopping me now.' He boards the train, his father and a few friends, even a townsfolk or two who until this day had barely paid him any attention, as if realizing now that his leaving has been the point all along, send him off with their best wishes. He sits in the train, and he begins to think, "but he did not think of anything very big or dramatic.... [T]he serious and larger aspects of his life did not come to mind." Instead, he thinks of the little things, of people in the town, mostly, his mind putting them in place in Winesburg: "Turk Smollet wheeling boards through the main street of the town ... Butch Wheeler the lamplighter of Winesburg hurrying through town ... a torch in his hand, Helen White standing by a window

in the Winesburg post office and putting a stamp on an envelope" (138).

George has developed, Ingram writes, "a reflective, selfless love," positing that this indicates he no longer belongs in Winesburg, "a land of fragmented lives and frustrated dreams."[37] It is this paper's contention, however, that in leaving the town, he is not leaving its residents behind. Has no intention of doing so. With him, he has their stories, their dreams, and for them he carries their hopes—for him; for themselves—which serve them twice, once as their voice within, and once again as their voice out and into the world beyond Winesburg.

Notes

1 David Stouck, from *New Essays on "Winesburg, Ohio,"* ed. John W. Crowley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 27-51. *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism,* eds. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 222.

2 Sherwood Anderson, from *Letters of Sherwood Anderson,* eds. Howard Mumford Jones and Walter B. Rideout (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953) 403-7. *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism,* eds. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 149.

3 Kim Townsend, from *Sherwood Anderson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) 110-17. *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism,* eds. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 208.

4 Heywood Broun, rev. of *Winesburg, Ohio* by Sherwood Anderson, *New York Tribune* 31 May 1919: 10. *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism,* ed. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 161.

5 Burton Rascoe, rev. of *Winesburg, Ohio* by Sherwood Anderson, *Chicago Tribune* 7 June 1919: 13. *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism,* eds. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 161.

6 Broun 160.

7 "Sordid Tales," rev. of *Winesburg, Ohio* by Sherwood Anderson, *New York Evening Post* 19 July 1919: III, 3. *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism,* ed. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 164.

8 John Nicholas Beffel, "Small Towns and Broken Lives," rev. of *Winesburg,*

Ohio by Sherwood Anderson, *New York Call* 21 September 1919: 10. *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism*, eds. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 165.

9 H. L. Mencken, "A Book of Uncommon Merit," rev. of *Winesburg, Ohio* by Sherwood Anderson. Source uncertain. Ray Lewis White, "Mencken's Lost Review of *Winesburg, Ohio*," *Notes on Modern American Literature 2* Spring 1978. *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism*, eds. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 163.

10 Sherwood Anderson, *Sherwood Anderson: Selected Letters*, ed. Charles E. Modlin (Knoxville: U of Tennessee Press, 1984) 152–56. *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism*, ed. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 145.

11 *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism*, eds. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 94. Subsequent parenthetical references to *Winesburg* will correspond in pagination to this edition.

12 John Updike, "Twisted Apples," *Harper's Magazine* 268 (March 1984): 95–97. *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism*, eds. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 193.

13 Anderson, *Sherwood Anderson: Selected Letters*, ed. Modlin, 152–56. *Winesburg, Ohio*, eds. Modlin and White, 144–45.

14 Anderson, from *Letters*, eds. Jones and Rideout, 4–5. *Winesburg, Ohio*, eds. Modlin and White, 141.

15 Sherwood Anderson, from *Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs*, ed. Ray Lewis White (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 1969) 346–50. *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism*, eds. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 155.

16 Anderson, *Sherwood Anderson: Selected Letters*, ed. Modlin, 152–56. *Winesburg, Ohio*, eds. Modlin and White, 148.

17 Sherwood Anderson, from *Sherwood Anderson: Centennial Studies*, eds. Hilbert H. Campbell and Charles E. Modlin (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston Publishing Company, 1976) 47–48. *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism*, eds. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 143.

18 Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris, *The Composite Novel: The Short Story Cycle in Transition* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995) 90.

19 J. Gerald Kennedy, "From Anderson's *Winesburg* to Carver's *Cathedral*: The Short Story Sequence and the Semblance of Community," *Modern American Short Story Sequences*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (New York: Cambridge Univer-

sity Press, 1995) 197.

20 Anderson, *Sherwood Anderson: Selected Letters*, ed. Modlin, 152-56. *Winesburg, Ohio*, eds. Modlin and White, 145.

21 Anderson, from *Memoirs*, ed. Ray Lewis White. *Winesburg, Ohio*, eds. Modlin and White, 153.

22 Anderson, from *Memoirs*, ed. Ray Lewis White. *Winesburg, Ohio*, eds. Modlin and White, 153.

23 Anderson, from *Memoirs*, ed. Ray Lewis White. *Winesburg, Ohio*, eds. Modlin and White, 154.

24 Anderson, from *Memoirs*, ed. Ray Lewis White. *Winesburg, Ohio*, eds. Modlin and White, 155. Anderson wrote on a number of occasions that the Winesburg stories were based on people of his hometown, Clyde, Ohio. (See Anderson's letter to Waldo Frank dated November 14, 1916 in *Letters of Sherwood Anderson. Winesburg, Ohio*, ed. Charles E. Modlin, 141, and letter dated November 14, 1916, a portion of which was reprinted in *Accent*, 1956, p. 125, wherein he states that *Winesburg* was "a series of intensive studies of people of my home town, Clyde, Ohio".) The apparent contradiction is easy enough to reconcile, when one considers how Anderson, or any writer for that matter, would blend the diverse elements—the varied experiences and influences—of his or her life into a work. In *Winesburg*, the persona-narrator (the implied author) fuses the fictional world of characters in the book with the real world of Anderson, the author. It would not be inaccurate to say that the *Winesburg* characters are a blending of the real people of his hometown with those he met in the Chicago boarding house and beyond, just as *Winesburg* itself is a blending of "the imaginative and the real worlds." (See Forrest L. Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the 20th Century*, 155.)

25 Forrest L. Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the 20th Century* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971) 19-21.

26 Townsend 208. (Ms. Townsend gives Anderson credit for at least this much: "[T]he idea of collecting the tales and organizing them around a central figure was Anderson's.")

27 Dunn 9.

28 Ingram 164.

29 Kennedy 194.

30 Anderson, *Memoirs*, 289.

31 Kennedy viii.

32 Kennedy xi.

33 Updike 194.

34 Anderson, from *Letters*, eds. Jones and Rideout, 403-07. *Winesburg, Ohio*, eds. Modlin and White, 150.

35 Anderson, from *Letters*, eds. Jones and Rideout, 403-07. *Winesburg, Ohio*, eds.

Modlin and White, 150.

36 Walter B. Rideout, "The Simplicity of *Winesburg, Ohio,*" *Shenendoah* 13 (Spring 1962): 20-31. *Winesburg, Ohio: an authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism,* eds. Charles E. Modlin and Ray Lewis White (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) 174.

37 Ingram 172.

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